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ART. II. — *The Life of* HARMAN BLENNERHASSETT. *Comprising an Authentic Narrative of the Burr Expedition; and containing many additional Facts, not heretofore published.* By WILLIAM H. SAFFORD. Cincinnati. 1853. 12mo. pp. 239.

AARON BURR was born at Newark, New Jersey, on the 6th of February, 1756. His father, a divine of eminence, was the first President of Princeton College; his maternal grandfather, Jonathan Edwards, the metaphysician, was the second President. Burr gave early indications of talent, and was graduated with distinction at the age of sixteen. The Revolution, just opening, aroused the enthusiasm of all the ardent youth of the country. It reached its crisis when the battle of Lexington was fought, on the 19th of April, 1775; and Burr, in company with many others, in the following July, joined the American army at Cambridge. Quebec, the most important fortress on the Canadian frontier, was at that time the stronghold of the British at the North. An expedition for its capture was projected by Arnold. It was generally conceived to be a desperate project: the winter would set in before the troops could reach the St. Lawrence; Maine at that time was a perfect wilderness, and its dark pine-forests were supposed to be almost impenetrable; but Arnold was firm, and Burr, eager for excitement and martial glory, proposed to join the expedition.

They marched from Cambridge on the 14th of September. After sixty or seventy days of incredible toil, they effected a junction with Montgomery, then commanding that portion of our army stationed on the St. Lawrence. The combined forces made an attack, under cover of a snow-storm, on the morning of the 31st of December. The result was disastrous to the Americans. They were repulsed; and Montgomery fell, mortally wounded, into the arms of Burr, who conducted himself throughout the march and attack as a skilful tactician and a courageous man. Recommended to the esteem of Washington by his gallant bearing on this occasion, he received an appointment near the person of the Commander-in-chief. A few weeks were sufficient to arouse distrust on one

side and aversion on the other. The circumstances of this affair are yet involved in mystery ; but until a satisfactory explanation is produced, his sudden departure must reflect upon the character of Burr. Washington was never hasty, and seldom incorrect in his judgment ; and from that period he declared that his confidence in Burr was for ever destroyed. He afterwards refused to sanction his nomination as Ambassador to France.

Burr was about to quit the service ; but, at the solicitation of Hancock, he joined the staff of General Putnam, and exhibited his usual intrepidity at the battle of Long Island Heights, and the subsequent night's retreat to New York. He served in the army, with the rank of colonel, until March, 1777, and was considered a faithful, brave, and efficient officer.

Under the plea of ill health, he handed in his commission, stating the reasons which induced him to resign it. The reply of Washington was courteous, but laconic. He regretted the loss which the service would sustain by the absence of Burr, and also the cause which rendered his absence necessary, and closed by notifying him that, when he found it convenient to transmit a settlement of his public accounts, the resignation would receive a final acceptance. Although Burr's promotion had been commensurate with his services, we have good reason to believe that his resignation was partially induced by a feeling that he had been slighted. Burr had sided with Gates and Lee against Washington, when the rupture took place during the winter of 1777-8, at Valley Forge ; and he felt that his conduct during this affair would do nothing toward ameliorating the early impressions that Washington had formed against him. Not powerful enough to supplant him, and too proud to endeavor to conciliate his esteem, he determined to escape the overshadowing influence of Washington's command and popularity.

Shortly after his retirement, he married the widow of Colonel Prevost, of the British army, studied law, and was admitted to the bar at Albany. The Revolutionary war was now drawing to a close ; the preliminary treaties of peace were signed ; and in the autumn of 1783, New York having been evacuated by the British soldiery, Burr removed to that city, where his legal

skill and sagacity soon gained for him an extensive practice. Upon removing to New York, he had joined the ranks of the Federalists, whom his chances of promotion afterward induced him to desert. He was not the man to scruple at a political somerset, and finally gave in his adhesion to the Democratic, then called the Republican party. He was appointed Attorney-General, then Judge of the Supreme Court of New York, then chosen United States Senator. He took his seat in the Senate in the autumn of 1791. He opposed the measures of his former coadjutors with an energetic spirit, and was considered the member of the opposition most capable of counteracting the ascendancy of Hamilton, the illustrious leader of the Federalists. He took an active part in supporting the contested seat of Albert Gallatin. He opposed the appointment of Chief Justice Jay as Ambassador to England, and also the treaty with that country, negotiated by Mr. Jay after his appointment; but his party was in the minority, and he was unsuccessful in all the measures which he advocated. The style of his oratory was precisely opposite to that of Hamilton, his great competitor. Burr reasoned; Hamilton speculated. Burr's manner was cool, compact, and destitute of all rhetorical embellishment; Hamilton's was impetuous, and his diction of Ciceronian splendor.

At the expiration of Burr's term in the Senate, he was elected a member of the State Assembly for the City of New York. In the mean time, the administration of Mr. Adams was drawing to a close; and, having performed the duties of his responsible office to the satisfaction of his own party, he was nominated for re-election. Mr. Pinckney, of South Carolina, was substituted upon the new ticket for Thomas Jefferson, the then Vice-President, who now headed the ranks of a distinct and powerful party. Jefferson dissented from the financial system of Hamilton, which had been adopted by the Federalists. He advocated a curtailment of the privileges of the judiciary, rotation in office, and State sovereignty. Jefferson and Burr were the nominees of the Republicans. The result of a Presidential election, at that time, promised to be such as would necessarily carry out the wishes of the great mass of the people; but the contest of 1800 subjected the

election laws to a practical test which clearly demonstrated the contrary. It was perfectly understood that Jefferson was the choice of the Republicans for the Presidency. Ordinary care would have secured his choice by the vote of the Electors. The Constitution declared that each State should appoint, in such manner as the Legislature thereof might direct, a number of Electors equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives to which the State might be entitled in Congress. These constituted the Electoral College, each member of which voted by ballot for two persons. The person receiving the greatest number of votes was declared President, provided such number was a majority of the Electors appointed. If there were more than one having such a majority and an equal number of votes, the election devolved upon the House of Representatives, voting by States. A quorum for this purpose consisted of the Representatives from two thirds of the States, and a majority of all the States was requisite for a choice. Adams was the Presidential candidate of his party, and one Federal Elector withheld his vote from Mr. Pinckney, in order to secure the majority of Adams. From some misunderstanding or blunder, such a precaution was neglected by the Republicans; and when the electoral votes were unsealed by Jefferson, as presiding officer of the Senate, in the presence of both houses of Congress, Burr unexpectedly found himself elevated to a competitorship for the first office in the gift of the nation. It was a dizzy eminence, and might have subjected the principles of a more virtuous man to a severe test. Burr had no small claim upon the gratitude of his party. They had appointed him to offices calling for the display of integrity and talent; he had certainly filled them with marked ability, and, so far as we know, with perfect uprightness. Whatever might be the result of the approaching contest, the Democratic President would owe his election to the instrumentality of Burr. In the election for President in 1796, New York had cast a Federal vote; since then, Burr's influence had won ascendancy for his own party, reversed the vote of the Electors, and (as in the memorable contest of 1844, the national result depending upon the vote of New York) secured victory to the Republicans. His position was now unpre-

cedented, yet there was but one course for a high-minded man to pursue. Purely entitled to accident for the place he occupied, he should have instantly disclaimed all competitorship for the office intended for another. Burr was at Albany whilst the election was pending. The votes were unsealed on the 11th of February, 1801. On the 16th of December previous, Burr had written to Senator Smith, of Maryland, thus: "It is highly improbable that I shall have an equal number of votes with Mr. Jefferson; but if such should be the result, every man who knows me ought to know that I would utterly disclaim all competition. Be assured, that the Republicans can entertain no wish for such an exchange. As to my friends, they would dishonor my views and insult my feelings by a suspicion that I would submit to be instrumental in counteracting the wishes and expectations of the people of the United States; *and I now constitute you my proxy to declare these sentiments, if the occasion shall require.*"

The Federal party in the House of Representatives had a numerical, though not a State majority. Burr had lately defeated and long since deserted them. But they had less to fear from his election than from that of Mr. Jefferson. The Federalists, in this dilemma, embraced the lesser evil, and when the contest came on, Burr was placed at the head of a formidable and dangerous opposition. The representatives determined to vote day and night without adjournment, until an election was effected; and for thirty-five ballotings Burr was supported by the united strength of the Federal party. The Republicans were equally inexorable. At that time there were sixteen States in the confederacy, the vote of nine, therefore, being requisite for a choice. From the first to the thirty-fifth ballot, Jefferson received the vote of eight, Burr of six, while two were divided, either of whose respective votes could have terminated the contest, and they were controlled by General Morris, of Vermont, and Mr. Bayard, of Delaware. The period of Adams's administration was near its close, and had these gentlemen persisted in their opposition, and dared to assume such a responsibility, they might have prevented the election of a new President; for the adherents of Burr were firm, and those of Jefferson would never have yielded. Deeply

impressed with the necessity and justice of giving way to the wishes of the nation, the Federalists were yet determined to negotiate for terms of capitulation ; and upon their being assured, from a reliable source, that important principles of the Federal policy would be recognized by the administration of Jefferson, the election was brought to a close, upon the thirty-sixth ballot, by Mr. Bayard, who, by withdrawing his opposition, changed the vote of Delaware, and terminated the protracted contest, Burr, according to the then existing provisions of the Constitution, being declared Vice-President.

It was supposed that Burr might have secured his election by a mortgage of executive patronage ; and it was inconceivable to the public that such an opening had escaped the practised eye of that consummate political gamester, who had been trained in the labyrinthine mazes of New York politics, which, more than half a century since, acquired the complicate nature they have always retained. Burr's principles were not so rigid as to have recoiled from corruption ; but there is no evidence whatever that it was employed. He was known to have resorted to dishonorable artifice when little was to be gained, and now that so splendid a prize was at stake, it was highly probable that his customary chicanery would be employed. The darkest rumors were circulated, and, unfortunately, the previous conduct of Burr had been such as to justify suspicion and give a speciousness to the charge. Jefferson never forgave him ; and his subsequent treatment of his defeated rival was utterly unworthy of the statesman and philosopher. Burr entered upon the duties of his new office with the reputation of a baffled intriguer. The culpable silence he always preserved under just or unjust imputation has been his most formidable accuser. Before a legal tribunal, the want of conclusive testimony of guilt justifies an assumption of innocence ; but at the bar of public opinion, a man who fails to repel suspicion and reproach virtually indorses the correctness of the popular verdict. Burr's reputation was injured, but not irretrievably ; we confidently believe that upon this occasion he suffered unmerited obloquy. Yet future rectitude would have reinstated him, for justice will gain the ascendant as inevitably as the tide that ebbs will flow

in its appointed course; and lapse of time might have vanished over this imputed blot upon his escutcheon, had not an unhappy event which was shortly to follow led to the resuscitation of every error he had ever committed. There was no possibility of his re-election to the Vice-Presidency; but his local influence in New York was great, he could depend for State appointments upon the support of a powerful party, and while still presiding over the Senate, in 1804, he was nominated for the Governorship of New York.

The influence of Alexander Hamilton was, at that period, perhaps greater than any single man has ever exercised in the State. Though not the opposing candidate, he threw the whole weight of his power into the Federal scale, and supported that cause with all the fiery impetuosity of his nature. Washington had long since declared Burr a dangerous and unprincipled man. Hamilton's conviction of his baseness was equally firm and immutable. He denounced him in philippics of scathing bitterness, as a profligate libertine and an infamous traitor to every principle of honor, integrity, and patriotism. The canvassing was conducted with a fierceness which threatened to end in violence and bloodshed. It lost its political character, and assumed a tone of personal animosity unworthy of the noble accuser, and terribly fatal in its results. Other politicians had denounced Burr with equal bitterness; but Hamilton was no ordinary antagonist,—he had been the evil genius of Burr's life, the friend of Washington whom he hated, the leader of a party which he had betrayed. Hamilton had been the chief obstacle to his promotion at every step of his career, his early competitor at the bar and in the Senate. When Burr made his fierce onslaught upon Jay's treaty, Hamilton had stood forth as the ablest defender of the executive policy, and finally had been instrumental in Burr's defeat for the Presidency. These offences were not to be overlooked. Burr had a keen sense of personal dignity. Eclipsed by his superior talents, and stung by his indignant rebukes, he challenged his accuser.

Hamilton reluctantly yielded an assent, and at sunrise on the 10th of July, 1804, in the forest of Weehawken, opposite New York, overlooking the beautiful Hudson, by the hand of



an assassin, perished a man in whom integrity and splendid talents were signally blended. Even those politicians who dissented from the theories of the limited monarchist acknowledged that his faults were those of a noble nature, and that the errors he committed were owing to the fiery vehemence of a lofty and an ardent mind. Terrible as was the result, more terrible still was the ensuing retribution. When it first became known throughout the country that Hamilton had been sacrificed by such an antagonist, the nation broke forth in execrations of indignant rebuke. Burr was denounced from the pulpit, shunned in public places, and completely ostracized in the private circles of which he had lately been the model and the ornament. The inconsistency is a strange one, that the very tribunal from the fear of whose condemnatory verdict many a duellist has gone forth to the field, instead of greeting the victor on his return from the conflict, refused the bloody hand, and proscribed for ever the unhappy man that had yielded to its exactions. Other men have engaged in similar affairs with no comparative injury to their fame. Society occasionally punishes by decimation, and one is made to suffer the penalty of a crime of which ten are guilty. Better men than Burr have been the objects of popular caprice; and more than one abject creature has been tired of hearing Aristides called "The Just." But nothing of the kind can be urged in extenuation of the present instance, and we must look elsewhere for a solution of the obloquy which Burr now found himself condemned to endure. Any one who will read the correspondence preliminary to the duel, will be satisfied that the death of Hamilton was the culmination of a purpose deliberately contrived and systematically carried out on the part of his antagonist. He felt that the limits of this country were too circumscribed for the presence of Hamilton and himself. The affair was conducted on the part of Burr with coolness and premeditation; he made unreasonable exactions, to which no honorable man could accede; and his memory was burdened with the foul deed for thirty-two years, without his uttering one sentiment of compunction or regret.

Burr thought it expedient to absent himself from the immediate scene of popular indignation, and travelled in the South-

western States until the meeting of Congress in the autumn. His term expired in the following spring. Mr. Jefferson was re-elected President; Mr. Clinton, of New York, was chosen Vice-President. Burr delivered a valedictory upon his retirement from office. Such an occasion had always been one of interest; but upon this occasion it is said to have been impressive beyond former example. The Senate contained at that period a constellation of talent, to find whose parallel we must come down to the time of the immortal triumvirate so recently removed. The lobbies were crowded in expectation of the event. There were to be seen side by side the stately dignity of beautiful women, and the noble bearing of accomplished and high-spirited men. Burr, the duellist politician, did not command the sympathies of his audience; but his talents were extraordinary, and his oratory, though not brilliant, possessed an earnestness, point, and energetic vigor, which to an enlightened audience are far more attractive than the studied graces of the mere elocutionist. He adverted to the kindly amenities which he had experienced from the members. He recommended a rigid adherence to the most trivial points of decorum and order, and urged them to maintain the dignity, which he had endeavored to inculcate by precept and example, so requisite for legislative bodies, and commensurate with the high position of Senators. In closing, he challenged their attention to considerations more momentous than any which regarded merely personal honor and character. He told them in the most earnest and impressive manner: "This house is a sanctuary and a citadel of law, of order, of liberty; and it is here—it is here, in this exalted refuge—here, if anywhere, will resistance be made to the storms of popular frenzy and the silent arts of corruption; and if the Constitution be destined ever to perish by the sacrilegious hands of the demagogue and the usurper, which may God avert, its expiring agonies will be witnessed on this floor." Thus closed his valedictory. He neglected to vindicate his reputation, and the public construed that neglect into the sullen contumacy of guilt. All the avenues of honorable distinction were now closed against him, and his lot was thenceforth to be cast with that of the adventurer and the outlaw; but ignominy and

disgrace could not extinguish the ambition which had carried off the honors of Princeton, and the energy which had penetrated the forests of Maine. He could hope for no executive appointment under the administration of Jefferson. Hated by the Republicans for having nearly defeated their champion, hated by the Federalists for having slain their idol, stung by the rebukes of a justly indignant community, he angrily turned to projects as reprehensible as the annals of ill-regulated ambition have ever recorded.

Far away, toward the tropics, lay an extensive and magnificent empire. Rumor had invested it with the wealth of some fabulous El Dorado. Its climate was mild and genial, its soil of spontaneous fertility, and its mineral wealth had long poured a silver stream into the treasury of Spain. No ordinary share of the blessings of this planet had been vouchsafed by nature to Mexico, but with those blessings appeared to have been mingled a curse; and, possessing all the natural elements of national greatness, — a territory of immense extent, and a soil no less productive than that of Belgium or France, — she held no position among the nations. That beautiful country was inhabited by a degenerate race. There were to be found in contemptible perfection the fierce vices and the abject pusillanimity of the coward, the bigot, and the slave. No trace remained of the ancient civilization of the Aztecs, whose character and polity, though rugged and cruel, were not entirely destitute of ennobling attributes. An ignoble submission to a foreign yoke now extinguished every vestige of nationality. They languished under the despotism of their Spanish masters, and were kept in cringing subjection by the weak arm of an inefficient and profligate soldiery. The state revenues were monopolized by tyrannical viceroys, and by a church already rich in everything but those principles of enlightenment which are the origin of national prosperity and power. Commercial stagnation, ignorance, and superstition told of civil discord and the dominion of the Jesuit. The government had become a stake for political gamblers. The vice-regal palace was a Gehenna of pollution, and those creeping reptiles, the intriguers for office, without integrity or talent, rioted in the corruptions of the body politic. Such was the condition of

this unhappy land, when a new Cortez was meditating the seizure of what prosperity and power remained to its inhabitants. The project of its revolution had at one time been considered expedient in the highest diplomatic circles of Washington. Miranda, in 1797, had sounded Hamilton concerning a similar enterprise in South America. The British ministry had seconded his views, and was to supply a fleet; the United States was to furnish the invading army. The scheme had been discountenanced by the President, and abandoned, but the affair had given direction to the public mind.

Burr now turned his thoughts to the conquest of Mexico, and with no unreasonable hopes of success. The government was weak and unstable, like all governments not founded upon the interest or affection of its subjects. The daring conspirator possessed, in an eminent degree, those qualities of intellect and bearing which would have enlisted the admiration, and a force of will which would have curbed the outbreak, of the abject nation which he aspired to control. His marvellous talents for intrigue and persuasion were now brought into full play for the accomplishment of his designs. By touching upon the interest, ambition, or philanthropy of those he wished to enlist, he presented the plan to each in its most plausible and attractive shape. To the avaricious, he would point to the mines of Potosi, and hold up to miserly eyes a vision of booty not less splendid than that with which a Peruvian Inca had essayed to purchase his life; to the ardent and imaginative mind of youth, he would offer a prospect of distinction and martial glory, sounding titles of office, the dazzling insignia of orders, and all the gorgeous pomp and ceremonial of a splendid court; while he would gain the sympathies of prudent age and discretion, by the hope of regenerating a downtrodden people, of diverting into their legitimate channels the ample resources of agriculture and commerce which were now stagnant from the oppressive restrictions of a narrow-minded colonial policy, and establishing a free and independent government over one of the fairest portions of America, whose advantages to the civilized world would be immediate and inestimable. No man could present these allurements with more skill or argumentative force than Aaron Burr.

In 1797, an Irishman had fled, with his family and fortune, from the political agitations of his native land. He had purchased an island on the Ohio, the most beautiful of Western rivers, and there surrounded himself with all that could minister to the enjoyment of a refined and cultivated taste. Burr found in this retired scholar a valuable accomplice for his purposes. His fortune was ample, his nature was pacific and averse to the excitement of war, and it was in the pursuit of quiet and seclusion that he had sought a home in the Western wilderness. To such a person the ordinary allurements of wealth and distinction would have been held forth with little success by most men; but the persuasions of Burr were irresistible. Herman Blennerhassett was no match for that consummate master of all the arts of diplomacy; and, in a short time, the ascendancy of Burr was complete.

General Wilkinson was at that time commander-in-chief of the American army stationed in the Louisiana Territory, and his coöperation was requisite for the success of the enterprise; for he commanded the pass of the Mississippi at New Orleans, and Burr would derive an important advantage from the assistance of Wilkinson, in being able to hold it out to the scrupulous as an evidence of the tacit sanction of the government to his design. Burr was desperate, and would have dared approach any man of known integrity who could have aided him; but the virtue of Wilkinson was not supposed to be incorruptible. Stationed upon the border of the Spanish provinces, and intrusted with the defence of our Southern frontier, popular report had accused him of being the pensioner of the Spanish viceroy, in Mexico. He was distrusted by Jefferson, and had reason to believe that he was in danger of court-martial and displacement. Burr rightly supposed that a man of lax principles would not be unwilling to exchange an office he held by so uncertain a tenure, for the prospect of greater emolument and almost supreme command of the armies of a military despotism.

Burr proceeded from Blennerhassett's Island down the Ohio, to Fort Massac, near its junction with the Mississippi. He spent several days with Wilkinson, who was stationed there; and we have every reason to believe that the result of this

conference was a promise, on the part of the commander-in-chief, of his own coöperation and that of the American army. Our relations with Spain were at that time very unsettled, and the strong probability of a war gave a plausible coloring to the preparations of Burr. This was held out to the pioneers of the Southwest, whom he designed to engage. The usual sagacity of Burr did not forsake him. To have presented his unlawful design in its real nakedness to the mass of his followers, would have been greatly to misconceive the character of those he had undertaken to seduce. They were an impulsive and high-spirited people, the outbreaks of whose temper contrasted strangely with the cool mental equipoise of the North. There was in their nature a patriotism, perhaps not unmingled with an eagerness for excitement, which would have taken up arms upon the first declaration of war with Spain; but one element of that very patriotism was a loyalty which would have revolted from a scheme unsanctioned by the Federal government, and would have been little disposed to assist in, or even connive at, the ambitious projects of a disappointed political adventurer.

For security against the suspicious eyes of his enemies, who were both numerous and influential, Burr gave out, to account for his presence in the Southwest, that he proposed cutting a canal around the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville, and was engaged in land speculation on the Washita. Blennerhassett was superintending the construction of barges for transports down the Mississippi, whilst Burr travelled in the Southwest, enlisting recruits for his enterprise.

The Romish Bishop of Louisiana was informed of the scheme, which was also confided to the Superior of the Ursuline Convent of New Orleans. They undertook to secure the coöperation of the Mexican Jesuits. The network of preparation now began to assume a strength and unity which gave the fairest promise of ultimate success.

General Dayton was also a conspirator; and on the 16th of July, 1807, he writes to Wilkinson thus:—

“It is now well ascertained that you are to be displaced next session. Jefferson will pretend to yield reluctantly to the public sentiment; but yield he will; prepare yourself, therefore, for it. You know the rest.

You are not the man to despair, or even despond, especially when such prospects offer in another quarter. Are you ready? Are your numerous associates ready? Wealth and glory! Louisiana and Mexico!!”

Again he writes thus:—

“As you are said to have removed your head-quarters down the river, and there is a report that the Spanish intercept our mails, which pass necessarily through the territory occupied by them in order to reach you, I think proper to address you in cipher, that the contents may be concealed from the Dons, if they make so free as to open the letters. Everything, and even Heaven itself, seems to have conspired to prepare the train for a grand explosion. Are you also ready? For I know you flinch not when a great object is in view. Your present is more favorable than your late position; and as you can retain it without suspicion or alarm, you ought by no means to retire from it until your friends join you in December, somewhere on the river Mississippi. Under the auspices of Burr and Wilkinson, I shall be happy to engage; and when the time arrives, you will find me near you. Write and inform me by first mail what may be expected of you and your associates. In an enterprise of such moment, considerations even stronger than affection impel me to desire your cordial coöperation and active support.”

Burr writes to Wilkinson two days afterwards, by a confidential messenger, thus:—

“I, Aaron Burr, have obtained funds, and have actually commenced the enterprise. Detachments from various points, and under different pretences, will rendezvous on the Ohio, 1st November. Everything external and internal favors our views: protection of England is secured; T—— is going to Jamaica, to arrange with the admiral at that station. It will meet on the Mississippi. England, — Navy of the United States is ready to join, and final orders are given to my friends and followers. It will be a host of choice spirits. Wilkinson shall be second to Burr only. Wilkinson shall dictate the rank and promotion of his officers. Burr will proceed westward, 1st August, never to return; with him goes his daughter; the husband will follow in October with a corps of worthies. Send forthwith an intelligent and confidential friend, with whom Burr may confer; he shall return immediately with further interesting details. This is essential to concert and harmony of movement. Send a list of all persons known to Wilkinson west of the mountains, who may be useful, with a note delineating their characters.

“By your messenger send me four or five of the commissions of your

officers, which you can borrow under any pretence you please. They shall be returned faithfully. Already are orders to the contractors given to forward six months' provisions to points Wilkinson may name. These shall not be used until the last moment, and then under proper injunctions. The project is brought to the point so long desired. Burr guarantees the result with his life and honor, with the lives, the honor, and fortune of hundreds, the best blood of our country. Burr's plan of operation is to move down rapidly from the falls on the 15th of November, with the first five hundred or one thousand men, in light boats now constructing for that purpose, to be at Natchez between the 5th and 15th of December, then to meet Wilkinson, then to determine whether it will be expedient in the first instance to seize on or pass by Baton Rouge. On receipt of this send an answer, and draw on Burr for all expenses. The people of the country to which we are going are prepared to receive us. Their agents now with Burr say, that if we will protect their religion, and will not subject them to a foreign power, in three weeks all will be settled. The gods invite to glory and fortune: it remains to be seen whether we deserve the boon."

These letters were written in a cipher known to all three of the parties, Dayton, Wilkinson, and Burr. The organization was not so widely extended as the hints thrown out might lead us to suppose. It is impossible to ascertain, or even approximate to, the number of adventurers whom Burr had engaged; but they were certainly sufficient, had their plans been conducted with secrecy, to promise success. Had they organized at the mouth of the Ohio, passed rapidly down the Mississippi, and seized New Orleans before it had time to prepare for defence, a multitude of lawless and disaffected spirits, to be found in every community, would have joined their standard, plundered the banks, secured from the shipping a number of transports, and sailed down into the Gulf on their nefarious expedition, under the specious pretext of revolutionizing Mexico from her ignominious vassalage to Spain. But Jefferson was on the alert; his vigilance was perhaps not a little quickened by considerations independent of his duties as guardian of the national welfare, and his emissaries were in the Southwest ferreting out the details of the conspiracy. The public had received intimations of what was going on around them; and, as usual in times of popular excitement, the most absurd rumors were in circulation.



Burr was to seize upon the throne of the Montezumas, and found a magnificent empire. He would then revolutionize the Mississippi valley ; and, succeeding in this, would extend the frontiers of his dominion beyond the Alleghanies, and overthrow the Federal government. The keeper of the Castle of San Juan de Ulloa had sold himself to the conspirators. A force of ten thousand men was organizing somewhere. Arms and ammunition were deposited at Marietta.

The idea of dismembering the Federal Union would have been wild and chimerical in the extreme. It is highly probable that Burr may at one time have meditated such a project, though upon his death-bed he solemnly averred that he would as readily have undertaken the conquest and partition of the moon. He certainly sounded upon the subject persons whom he had reason to regard as hostile to Mr. Jefferson, and vauntingly remarked, that with two hundred soldiers he could drive Congress, with the President at its head, into the Potomac ; but it is ridiculous to believe that the preparations on Blennerhassett's Island were made with any such end in view. Urged on by resentment against an Executive that hated and a people that distrusted him, eager for action and ambitious of power, there can be no question, that, had his means been adequate to the accomplishment of so mighty a purpose, he would not have been deterred from it by any scruples of integrity. Burr was a desperate and a daring man, but not a visionary, and he is absolved from the imputation rather by the excellence of his judgment than by the strength of his patriotism.

There would not have been the most remote possibility of success. There had been local irritation in the country, but no widely organized popular discontent. Kentucky had threatened to establish an independent government, but had been quieted upon her admission into the Union. Whilst Louisiana was a province of Spain, the right of deposit had been guaranteed to the Federal States at New Orleans. This right had been suspended by Morales, the agent of Spain, — a measure vitally affecting the interests of South-western commerce. Outraged by such an encroachment upon their stipulated rights, the people had threatened the forcible

seizure of New Orleans. For a long time Kentucky had been the most fiercely democratic part of the country. The French Revolution had enlisted the deepest sympathy of the people. Jacobin clubs had been established, and they had been dissatisfied with the neutral and pacific measures of Washington and Adams. They had protested against our fancied subserviency to England, and urged a direct intervention for preserving the liberties of France. But these feelings had now subsided, the political party they favored was in power, and they gave to the administration of Jefferson a most cordial and active support.

Spain had ceded Louisiana to France; and Bonaparte, on the eve of war, in need of money to conduct it, and perhaps fearful that his tenure of so remote a province would be endangered by the naval superiority of England, was induced to negotiate for its transfer to the United States with Monroe and Livingston, their special ambassadors. Without precise authority to make the purchase, they assumed the responsibility, and closed the bargain, which was eventually ratified by Congress.

There was a growing confidence throughout the country in the stability of our institutions, public feeling had become tranquillized, and the nation felt that the Confederacy would soon assume a consolidation, strength, and prosperity beyond any former example. The project of Burr was therefore unfortunate in the moment of its conception,—unfortunate in the perfidy of its accessories,—unfortunate in the ruined character of its principal. Wilkinson became frightened at the rumors which now agitated the whole Southwest, turned state's evidence, and divulged the scheme to the President. A confidential messenger of Jefferson, sent to the scene of the enterprise at Marietta, found Blennerhassett, who, under the delusion that the spy was an accomplice of Burr, reiterated to him in effect the developments of Wilkinson. A proclamation was issued by the Executive, warning the nation of the dangers which threatened it, and calling for the intervention of the judicial authorities. Before it reached Kentucky, "The Western World," a newspaper of Frankfort, had by some means gotten possession of the details, and unfolded the con-

spiracy to the public. Some of the first men of Kentucky were accused of participation in the plot; among others, Harry Innes and Judge Sebastian. The latter had previously been arraigned before the House on the charge of being the pensioner of Spain, and the committee of investigation had reported him guilty. Innes had passed without impeachment, but not without private censure. Burr was now openly accused in "The Western World" of aiming to plunge the country into the horrors of insurrection and civil war. The high position of the parties implicated, the bold confidence with which the charge was made, and the authentic proofs by which it was upheld, threw the people into a state of unprecedented excitement and alarm; which was still further increased when, Colonel Daviess, United States District Attorney, having made application to Judge Innes for process of attachment, to compel the attendance of Burr to answer to the charge of high misdemeanor in organizing a military expedition against a foreign power with which we were at peace, within the territory and jurisdiction of the United States, Innes overruled the motion. Burr was in Lexington at the time, and, when he received news of the affair, at once hurried to the capital, and voluntarily challenged an investigation of the charge. The case was deferred from day to day, for the attorney to summon his witnesses, Burr exhibiting in the mean time his usual tranquillity and composure. At last, on the 2d of December, 1806, the grand jury was finally summoned, and the case was to be brought to a conclusive issue. Burr entered the court-room with easy dignity and confidence, attended by his counsel, Henry Clay, — unquestionably the first criminal advocate this country has produced; for, without the subtle intellect of Calhoun, or the capacious understanding of Webster, in the power of enlisting the sympathies, and infusing into his audience the electric impulse of his own fiery sensibility, he has never been surpassed. Before undertaking the defence, he had exacted a solemn assurance from his client that he was engaged in no enterprise inimical to the laws or peace of the United States. It was readily given in the most explicit and comprehensive terms. The witnesses of Colonel Daviess were not forthcoming, and he

requested a further postponement. Says the historian of Kentucky: "Burr on this occasion remained silent, and entirely unmoved by anything that occurred. Not so his counsel. A most animated and impassioned debate sprung up, intermingled with sharp and flashing personalities between Clay and Daviess. Never did two more illustrious orators encounter each other in debate. The enormous mass that crowded to suffocation the floor, the windows, the galleries, and the platform of the judge, remained silent and breathless for hours, whilst those renowned and immortal champions, stimulated by mutual rivalry, and each glowing with an ardent conviction of right, encountered each other in splendid intellectual combat." Judge Innes refused a further postponement, the grand jury retired with the evidence then before them, and returned with "Not a true bill," and also handed in a unanimously signed paper of complete exoneration and acquittal. Burr retired from the court-room with the same lofty bearing he had maintained throughout the affair, and thus ended the Kentucky episode of the conspiracy. Justice for a time was baffled, but the public mind was aroused and on the alert.

Blennerhassett in the mean time had been superintending the construction of barges up the Ohio. His island was to be the rendezvous and starting-point of the expedition. By authority of the executive proclamation, the Virginia militia had been called out, and were now marching toward the island, to seize the barges and munitions of the conspirators. They reached it on the 11th of December, but the expedition had started the midnight previous. Colonel Phelps, their commander, hastened on to the mouth of the Kanawha, by a short route, to intercept them at that point. Sentinels were stationed along the river banks, and fires were kindled at night; but they escaped his vigilance, floated by under the cover of darkness, and joined Burr, who awaited them at the mouth of the Cumberland. Their united force now consisted of eleven barges, and sixty or seventy men.

The proclamation of the President had by this time reached their vicinity, and elicited similar ones from the authorities of the Southwestern States. Their militia were called out, the passes of the Mississippi were fortified, and the country was

in arms, whilst Burr and his valiant army of undisciplined ragamuffins were quietly paddling their barges down the Ohio. The absurdity of the whole affair finds its parallel only in the late expedition to Cuba. The condition of Burr soon became desperate in the extreme. Openly accused and hunted by the civil authorities, and betrayed by his accomplices, there must have rushed upon his mind, as he floated down the Mississippi, the fate of an ambitious adventurer from another continent, who, more than two centuries ago, found a grave in the depths of that majestic river.

The enterprise, conceived in desperation and cupidity, was now about to end in absurdity and shame. The Governor of Mississippi Territory had issued warrants for the arrest of Burr and his confederates. Burr, having first sunk his arms and ammunition in the river, and destroyed every clew to his warlike designs, landed at Bayou Pierre, and invited an investigation of his affairs. A place of conference was appointed with Judge Rodney of the Supreme Court, who demanded of Burr that his barges should be searched, and his own person surrendered, for trial by the proper authorities. He acquiesced; but Mr. Poindexter, the Attorney-General, insisted that the offences of Burr, having been committed elsewhere, did not come within the jurisdiction of that court. Judge Rodney dissented, and a grand jury was summoned. Poindexter refused to have anything to do with the matter. The jury declined making a presentment.

Burr was not yet safe; and, learning that he was to be seized by military force as soon as he was released from civil custody, he escaped his keepers, and, disguising himself, fled into the interior of Mississippi Territory. Blennerhassett, having been discharged, returned up the Ohio, and was proceeding through Kentucky to his island, but was arrested in Lexington, and carried for trial into Virginia, within whose jurisdiction the overt act of treason was said to have been committed. The barges, with the subordinates of the expedition, had floated down to New Orleans, where they were seized by Wilkinson, and their occupants imprisoned by the same authority.

On the 19th of February, Burr was arrested on the Tom-

bigbee River, in company with a single companion, Major Ashley, who escaped. The midnight previous they had passed through the village of Wakefield, Alabama. The lateness of the hour and the mysterious conduct of the travellers had excited the suspicion of the sheriff, who followed them to Colonel Hinson's, in the neighborhood, where they alighted for the night. Burr requested some refreshment of the hostess. The vivacity of his countenance and his courtly demeanor soon assured her that she was entertaining no common guest. The sheriff, who entered shortly after, had often heard of the extraordinary lustre of Burr's eye, which at that moment, excited by the exercise of his journey, shone with unusual brilliancy; and he no longer doubted the identity of the celebrated man before him. Knowing his brave character and desperate position, he thought it expedient to go back for assistance. Burr had watched him, and started at daylight, before the sheriff had returned, but was pursued, captured, and sent off under a strong guard to Virginia for trial.

On the 31st of March, 1807, the court convened at Richmond, under the presidency of Chief Justice Marshall. It is impossible to trace the events of that memorable occasion without recalling to mind the impeachment of Hastings. The intrinsic and derivative grandeur of Westminster Hall, — the devices of Gothic art, — the forms of procedure, whose origin was lost in the dim twilight and fable of a remote antiquity, — the transcendent talents of audience, advocates, and accusers, — all combined to invest the trial of the English Verres with a species of interest which is wanting to that of the American Catiline; but in the latter instance the principles involved were no less important, and its termination was fraught with lessons of no less moment. The prisoner at the bar was no ordinary man. Great political influence cannot be entirely the result of circumstances, and the dominion which Burr had so powerfully exercised over the men of his generation was not compatible with intellectual mediocrity. He had filled the Vice-Presidency, and was now arraigned before a tribunal of his fellow-countrymen for having betrayed the confidence with which they had honored him, and accused of having sought the downfall and dismemberment of that

Union which he had sworn to support. When he entered the court-room his mien was not that of a guilty man. His step was firm, his person erect and symmetrical. A skilful physiognomist would have detected, in the compressed lip and finely cut nostril, the stern inflexibility of purpose which raises men to power, and, in the keen lustre of his eye, the fertility of expedient which enables them to retain it. He seemed

“For contemplation and for valor formed.”

His countenance bore the unmistakable superscription of one born to dictate and control.

The preliminaries were conducted on the part of Rodney, Attorney-General of the United States, in a manner worthy of the position he occupied. He was at one time the host, and had long been the friend, of Burr; but he stated in opening, that the natural impulses of private regard must become subordinate to the duties of high import and responsibility that he owed to justice and his country. Burr had intrusted five eminent lawyers with his defence, but the accused himself was the mainspring of it all, and he handled every defensive legal weapon with masterly skill. Much time was spent in discussing points of law in regard to the admissibility of certain evidence before the grand jury. It required the discrimination of an ingenious casuist to determine precisely how far the offences of Burr came within the jurisdiction of American law; yet Marshall fully upheld his reputation for justice and clear-headed sagacity. Every point which could give an advantage to either party was pertinaciously contested. The result of the preliminary examination was the commitment of Burr to answer the charge of high misdemeanor. The court convened again on the 22d of May, and the jury this time brought in indictments for both treason and misdemeanor; and Burr was notified to attend and answer to the charges on the following 3d of August. John Randolph of Roanoke was the foreman. Burr plead “Not guilty,” and occupied himself until the appointed day in preparing his defence. When the court met in August, much difficulty was experienced in finding a jury. Several panels were necessary to complete the proper number. Such was now the popular feeling in Vir-

ginia against Burr, that he was compelled to receive men of known hostility in selecting his jurors, and we venture to say that a more prejudiced jury never pronounced upon a prisoner at the bar. When some objection was made to a proposed candidate, he tauntingly observed, that a sufficient ground for his rejection might be found in his name, which was Hamilton. The remark was conceived in a spirit of illiberality and malice, and would never have escaped the lips of a man of any magnanimity or honor. No change of countenance betrayed the terrible recollection which must at that moment have rushed upon the mind of Burr;— he merely rejected the candidate, and proceeded to complete the impanelling. After much difficulty, it was finished. Sixty witnesses were examined, and the evidence was sifted on both sides with extraordinary diligence and acumen.

It was now midsummer, and the court suffered extremely from the heat of a Southern climate. Burr was a man of great physical strength, and, after studying and arranging his defence until near daylight, would snatch a few hours of repose, and appear at the bar fresh and vigorous, giving no indication of the midnight's toil. For the sake of expedition, he proposed that the court should sit for ten consecutive hours daily. The judge and prosecuting officers shrank from testing their powers of endurance with the iron frame and inflexible will of the accused, and after some discussion they compounded for seven. Yet Burr seems to have found time for other pursuits. Blennerhassett remarks in his journal: "The vivacity of Burr's wit and the exercise of his proper talents, now constantly solicited here in public and private exhibition, while they display his powers and address at the levee and the bar, must engross more time than he can spare from the demands of other gratifications, while they display him to the eager eyes of the multitude like a favorite gladiator measuring over the arena of his fame with firm step and manly grace, the pledges of easy victory."

At one stage of the proceedings, Burr rose and stated that he had no desire at the present exigency to derange the affairs of government by demanding the presence of its officers, but that papers known to be in the hands of Mr. Jefferson must



be forthcoming, or he should certainly issue process of attachment, to compel the attendance of the President himself. Such a concession on the part of Jefferson would have been the last resort. Every expedient would have been tried before he would have allowed himself to mount the witness stand and be stretched upon Burr's inquisitorial rack. That legal anatomist would have laid his subject on the dissecting-board, and, with keen scalpel and steady hand, every ingenious method of torture would have been applied, until Jefferson would have wished himself a heretic, in the more tender clutches of a Romish inquisitor. The prosecution was driven by the potent enginery of executive influence. When we remember the private relations existing between the two men, it is clear that Jefferson manifested an unbecoming zeal. The author of the immortal protest for the rights of nations stooped to an ignoble part. The conduct of Burr throughout the trial was commendable in the highest degree. His reputation was ruined, but his life was at stake, and he might yet save himself the final degradation of the gibbet. He abstained from all personality, and entreated his counsel to do likewise; he was respectful to the august tribunal before which he was arraigned; to his accusers he was even courtly, and his bearing was in all respects worthy of a better cause and a nobler man.

Generals Eaton and Jackson were present as witnesses, to the former of whom Burr had hinted at the dissolution of the Confederacy. Eaton left the grand jury in rage and tears, protesting that his evidence had been probed, sifted, and handled as though he were a villain. Wilkinson had also been summoned, and when he made his appearance in the court-room his bearing is said to have been dignified and commanding, whilst Burr's usually placid countenance manifested a haughty contempt upon being confronted with his perfidious accomplice. Wilkinson was sent in to the jury, where perjury was clearly proved against him. He had altered the celebrated hieroglyphic letter from Burr, deciphered it, and transmitted a translation to the jury, upon oath that it was an exact counterpart of the original. The forgery was detected, and the guilty man forced to make an acknowledgment of his shame.

It would be irrelevant for us to enter into the minute details of the trial in the limited space of a review article ; but there was one brilliant episode in the imposing drama which is deserving of especial mention. The government had engaged the services of William Wirt, second to no lawyer of that time, in a State fruitful in splendid legal talents. A motion was made by the counsel of Burr to exclude certain evidence, upon the ground of Burr's absence from Blennerhassett's Island during the assemblage of the conspirators, thereby endeavoring to thrust Blennerhassett into the foreground as the principal. Upon this motion Wirt rose to speak. The skill of the accomplished rhetorician was made to embellish the learning of the fine jurist and the elegant scholar. The flowers of his exuberant fancy served to conceal the solid strength of his argument, and obstructed the march of his logical deductions. His diction was perhaps too ornate for the occasion, and he manifested an impassioned vehemence that strongly savored of personal hate, though such a feeling was altogether inconsistent with the high-toned magnanimity of Wirt. The secret of his unusual fire is to be found in his thorough conviction of Burr's guilt, and, as it was justly remarked of Burke, his reason was carried away and made red-hot by the impulse of an ardent sensibility. In opening, he characterized the measure as a bold and original stroke in the noble science of defence, indicating the hand of a master, but highly dangerous to the administration of impartial justice, and sanctioned by no precedent in the annals of equity. Its legality was handled in his peculiar rapid and felicitous manner, but he was not fully himself until he approached the miserable attempt to shield the principal behind the mere instrument and accessory. In language of Isocratean elegance he depicted the island paradise of the unfortunate Irishman, and invested a wild spot in the Western backwoods with the sunset colorings of romance and poetry. Seldom had his audience listened to such a display of eloquence, and it would have been difficult for them to believe that the glowing pictures existed chiefly in the vivid imagination of the orator. All who listened to his oration, (for it possessed little compactness or unity as an argument,) bore witness

to the exquisite grace and the passionate volubility of its flow.

The motion was allowed by the Chief Justice, and the jury consulted upon the admitted evidence, and agreed upon the following verdict: "We, of the jury, say that Aaron Burr is not proved to be guilty under this indictment, by any evidence submitted to us. We therefore find him 'Not guilty.'" Burr protested that it was an unusual and improper verdict. The judge allowed it to be recorded "Not guilty." The court then took up the indictment for misdemeanor. The prosecution, from the insufficiency of their evidence, moved a discharge of the jury, and the dismissal of the case; but Burr, now elated by success and confident of victory, insisted upon a verdict. The judge decided for the accused, and the jury, after a short consultation, pronounced a concise and unqualified verdict of "Not guilty."

Burr left the court-room an acquitted and a ruined man. The collateral evidence, decided to be inadmissible to the jury until the overt act of treason was proved by at least two responsible witnesses, was quite sufficient to prove him guilty of high misdemeanor. The verdict on the charge of treason clearly showed that they were satisfied of his criminality, but could not convict him under their instructions. Under the English constitution, where meditated treason is a capital crime, Burr would have suffered the highest penalty of the law. He was ordered to give bail for his attendance in Ohio to answer to the charge of misdemeanor, which he did; but the case was never brought up for trial.

The miserable man, completely ostracized in his native country, sought an asylum in Europe; but the mark of Cain was on him, and he found himself an outcast and an alien in the land of his forefathers. After wandering four years over Western Europe, he applied for passports to return; but they were refused by the United States officials, one of whom had assisted in the prosecution at Richmond. Burr submitted to the outrage with characteristic equanimity, and some time afterwards found means to return without their sanction.

When he arrived in New York, he was unnoticed. He commenced practising law; but with little success, for public

confidence in him was destroyed, and men shrank from contact with him as from a leper. Henry Clay, his former advocate, had now become convinced of his guilt, and refused his proffered hand in the Supreme Court. He earned a bare subsistence by his profession. Even at this time, for his private life no terms of censure can be too strong. It was that of a heartless and profligate libertine.

It is pleasing to turn from so repulsive a picture, and contemplate the noble youth of 1776, flushed with collegiate honors, — the hero of Quebec, greeted upon his return with the unanimous "All hail!" of his admiring countrymen, and like a vigorous athlete, with sinewy limbs and elastic tread, entering the arena of life in which he gave the fairest promise to enact a glorious, an immortal part.

At this time he lost his daughter, an only child, who had married Mr. Allston, and removed with him to South Carolina. She is said to have been a remarkable woman, possessing, in addition to the strong practical sense of her father, that bewitching grace and gentleness which is the peculiar gift of her sex. Upon her father's return from Europe, she embarked for New York on the *Patriot*, which was never heard from after leaving Charleston, and is supposed to have been lost in a storm, or possibly captured by the pirates which at that time infested the South Atlantic main. All the ordinary consolations of age were denied to Burr. He had no family in which he could seek for happiness and a refuge from public disgrace; the men of his own generation had nearly passed away, covered with honors and grateful remembrance; and he was to survive them, clouded in ignominy and shame. At last, in 1836, he died, and for years there was over his ashes not an epitaph, which is accorded to the obscure, not even a tombstone, which is the privilege of the stranger.

When we consider the fundamental and recognized political axiom, that the best government is that which secures the largest amount of happiness to a people, it becomes a point of reasonable conjecture whether the success of Burr's enterprise would not have materially benefited Mexico, though there can be little doubt that his government would have been that of an autocrat, — a military despotism. His administra-

tive talents were great, and though his rule would have imposed the evils which result of necessity from an exotic yoke, they might have been more than counterbalanced by the abolition of bloodshed and violence, the protection of property, and the restoration of social order.

Burr's letter to Wilkinson clearly indicates an understanding between the writer and the recipient. Otherwise, Burr was far too sagacious to have committed himself by so direct an acknowledgment of his unlawful enterprise to a man holding high office under the government, whose participation or even tacit sanction would have been a betrayal of the national trust. Wilkinson's conduct toward Burr does not bear the stamp of a noble mind filled with regret at the errors of a misguided friend, but rather of the anxiety of a frightened and perfidious accomplice to clear his own skirts of the affair, even at the sacrifice of his coadjutor and principal. Had Burr addressed him in such familiar terms in the hope that they would presuppose an implication in the project on the part of Wilkinson, an exposure of which would involve the recipient, thereby compelling his secrecy, what would have been the course of an innocent and high-minded man? Without hesitation he would have given the letter publicity, and disclaimed participation in the plot; he would have challenged investigation, and denounced the man who had attempted to coerce him into unlawful measures by the dread of apparent self-crimination, and who, unable to secure his co-operation by the hope of advancement, would at least compel him to silence by the fear of infamy; and then he would have boldly thrown himself upon his former good name for acquittal and support. Wilkinson was finally guilty of the consummate impudence of sending a messenger to the Spanish Viceroy, demanding the modest amount of two hundred thousand dollars for having saved that country, at great personal sacrifice, from the audacious machinations of Burr, or, as the General characteristically expressed it, "for throwing himself, Leonidas-like, into the Pass of Thermopylæ."

Though he was an accessory to schemes which he must have known were reprehensible, the mention of Blennerhassett awakens emotions of another nature than those with

which the memory of his principal is associated. Ruined in fortune, he returned to his native land, where he died. His wife came back to America to seek indemnity for the outrages committed by the populace upon their beautiful home on the memorable 11th of December. Her claims were eloquently supported by Henry Clay, and would have been allowed by Congress; but before the bill was passed, they received intelligence from New York of the death of the broken-hearted petitioner. Seldom has romance afforded so dark a tale of misfortune, as reality has woven around the name of Blennerhassett. The passengers on the steamer gliding down the beautiful Ohio crowd the guards in silence, as they approach the island that still bears his name, and seek to find some trace of the paradise described in the passionate language of Wirt. The stately residence was long since burned to the ground, its site is overgrown by the woodbine and wild-brier, and a few giants of the forest, isolated and alone, are the sole memorials of the sylvan beauty that has departed.

Aaron Burr was certainly an extraordinary man. Bold to conceive, and prompt to execute, he might have become one of the greatest military commanders the world has ever seen. His mental equilibrium was too finely adjusted to be much disturbed either by success or disaster. As a lawyer, he possessed a marvellous instinct for seizing upon the vulnerable points of an argument; as a politician, his judgments of character were sagacious, and his skill in arranging the minor details and machinery of an election was invaluable to his party. Wirt speaks of the light and beauty of his conversation, the seductive and fascinating power of his address. The proper field for the successful display of Burr's remarkable talents was not where a few intrepid minds, in defiance of obloquy and of personal sacrifice, were to make a stand for the great principles of liberty and progress; but when there was a demand merely for ambition, adroitness, and courage, he would have been among the foremost. Under Charles the Second he would have contested with royalty the smiles of those frail beauties whose images have been preserved to us by the pencil of Lely; under Frederick his intrepidity and skill would have placed him in the front rank of those great

captains of the Prussian army, long renowned for being the first tacticians of Europe ; under Lorenzo de' Medici, his talents for diplomatic intrigue might have given Machiavelli some reason to fear the influence he would have exercised over his beloved Italy. Burr's heart was hard ; his ambition was selfish ; his public life was guided by no fixed principle ; his private life was that of a debauchee. These are the crimes for which he stands arraigned before the judgment of all good men and patriots. The obloquy his memory has had to endure is not so much because he violated the laws of his country, which are local, but because he systematically outraged and set at defiance the broad principles of common honesty and decency, which are universal. It was for this that he fell ignominiously from his high position, became accursed of his race for ever, and his name a by-word and a shaking of the head to the nation ; and that, when he died, philosophy pointed to his life as an example of the evils which may result from the dangerous union of moral depravity and intellectual power, and virtue congratulated itself upon escaping the contaminating presence of a man whom neither public disgrace nor private affliction had contributed in any degree to chasten or to purify. The offences of some other men may have resulted in greater injury to their race ; but the errors of Burr were not those of a lofty and heroic mind, and it requires nothing beyond the ken of human prescience to say, that the age is remote when the most lenient of moralists will venture to urge anything in extenuation of the faults that have darkened his fame.

There are two men whose deeds have blackened the page of our national record, and the men of the present generation have shown no disposition to mitigate the sentence which their forefathers passed upon the characters of Benedict Arnold and Aaron Burr. We cannot have the pride of remembering that our greatest benefactors have always been honored with office, yet we can justly reflect that ignominy or forgetfulness has invariably rewarded the Judases that have betrayed us.